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PLAIN SERMONS

ON

THE LITURGY.

BY THE

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PLAIN SERMONS ON THE LITURGY.

1 *Corinthians* xiv., c., 10th v.—“Let all things be done decently and in order.”

SUCH was the advice which St. Paul gave to the Christians at Corinth, and how necessary it is to be observed in the public worship of Almighty God, our own sense of what is right and proper will very readily make us feel. The beautiful and most wonderful order which we see in the world of nature, is sufficient to teach us that God is not the author of confusion; but on the other hand that as far as He has been pleased to reveal Himself in nature, that uniformity, regularity, and order, mark in a clear, distinct and most emphatic way all his works and ways. Nor is it enough to say that such is the characteristic of all the works of nature, for we may go much farther and affirm, that the plan upon which God has made them is such, that order and regularity are absolutely necessary to their very preservation and existence. The heavenly bodies move in no wandering or erratic course. The planets and the systems of which we know anything so far from being in a state of disorder and confusion, pursue their appointed courses in the most exact and regular way, and the very smallest departure from this exactness would throw the whole creation, in all probability into confusion, and perhaps so change the constitution of things, that the creatures whom God

has made, might not be able to live upon the earth. Again, if we look at ourselves, we shall also feel satisfied that Order, in all the works of God, is what Our Creator designs. The wonderful way in which we are made, the dependence of one part of the body upon the other part, how the whole man is affected by the breaking up of one part, and that perhaps of small importance as far as we see, the order and regularity which mark the action of the several parts of the body, as the heart, the lungs and others, which must perform their functions with the greatest nicety, or else the whole stops, and we die. This teaches us, that God has made all things, all creatures to move and live by certain general laws, and they prove to us that as order and regularity mark all God's works and ways, so also that in all our intercourse with Him, we may justly suppose that He would wish to see the same. And if we go as far back as possible in the history of the worship of Almighty God, we shall find, that whenever He has been approached by the faithful, it has been characterized by this same feature.

As we come down nearer to ourselves in Scripture history, when the Almighty gave to his chosen people the Law, we shall find that in every possible way it was provided under the Jewish economy, that the service of God should be conducted with the utmost exactness and regularity. In order to this, it would seem almost, as a general thing, necessary that there should be some arrangement entered into for the purpose of conducting Divine Worship. If this is not done, it manifestly must be wanting in that method and arrangement which is so clearly manifest in all the works of God, and which, therefore, we must believe, He would desire to

see in any worship which His creatures paid to Him. We find, therefore, that when God gave to Israel the Law, that He gave to them many and particular directions as to how He was to be approached, and how His worship was to be conducted. Nor were the commands which the Almighty gave to His people simply of a general character, such as might direct them as to the kind of worship and service which would be acceptable to Him, while it left to them the duty of arranging its details. But God Himself gave most special and exact directions in every thing, even in the least and smallest particulars, so that the decency and orderly performance of Divine Worship was ensured.

And following thus what was in reality a command of God, the early Church had forms of prayer and a settled and uniform plan for the public services of religion, in accordance with the recommendation of St. Paul, "Let all things be done decently and in order" If we trace the history of the people of God, we shall find that not only did they worship the Almighty according to the ritual which was given to Moses in the mount, but still further that they worshipped God in set forms of prayer.* The very first piece of solemn worship recorded in Holy Scripture is a hymn of praise composed by Moses upon the deliverance of the children of Israel from the Egyptians, which was sung by all the congregation alternately : by Moses and the men first, and afterwards by Miriam and the women, which could not have been done, unless it had been a precomposed set form.

Again at the time of the expiation of an uncertain murder, the elders of the city which is next to the slain are expressly commanded to

*Wheatley.

say, and consequently to join in saying, a form of prayer, precomposed by God Himself. And in other places in Scripture we meet with several other forms of prayer, precomposed by God, and prescribed by Moses, which though they were not to be joined in by the whole congregation, are yet sufficient precedents for the use of precomposed set forms of prayer.

But the Scriptures still further assure us, that David appointed the Levites to stand every morning to thank and to praise the Lord, and likewise at even, which rule was observed in the Temple afterwards built by Solomon, and restored at the building of the second Temple after the captivity. And lastly the whole Book of Psalms were forms of prayer and praise, indited by the Holy Ghost, for the joint use of the congregation; as appears as well the titles of many of the Psalms, as from other places in Scripture. Innumerable proofs, both ancient and modern, might be brought forward to shew that the Jews did always worship God by precomposed set forms: and a research into their history will fully prove to us, that they made use of forms of prayer, and that the order and the arrangement of their prayers and praises was very much as we have it in the Book of Common Prayer. Now when we bear in mind, my brethren, that our blessed Saviour always continued in the communion of the Jewish Church and was zealous and exemplary in His attendance upon all the public devotions which it enjoined, and consequently took part in, and so sanctioned the worship of God by and through the use of set forms of prayer, not only have we the highest possible proof that they are the best, for the use of man, but we may safely say, that set forms of prayer have received the Divine sanction.

Had our Saviour not very constantly attended the public worship amongst His own people, and joined in the devotions of the congregation, the Scribes and the Pharisees, we may believe His most bitter and implacable enemies, would without doubt have cast this in his teeth, and would have reproached Him, as one who despised prayer. But we find nothing of this kind in the New Testament, and therefore had we no other grounds to go upon, we might safely conclude that our blessed Saviour was a constant attendant on the public services of the Jews, and consequently that He joined in precomposed set forms of prayer. As it undoubtedly was the custom of Our Lord and His Apostles, before the ascension, to join in the Jewish worship, which consisted of forms of prayer, so also we know that it was the custom of the Apostles and the early Christians to make use of forms of prayer, in their Christian assemblies. Apart from Scripture history which teaches us that the early Christians had forms of prayer, many ancient Liturgies are still extant, and many also of the prayers used in those ancient Liturgies are now at this present time, made use of in our own. Our Saviour gave to the disciples the Lord's Prayer as it is called, when asked by one of them to teach them to pray, as John also taught his disciples. We cannot for a moment suppose that Our Saviour's disciples were so ignorant or yet so entirely unaccustomed to pray, as to find it necessary to make this request of their Master, simply because they were unable to make known their their wants to God. To do this would certainly be taking a very low and unworthy estimate of our Lords disciples, and we may rather suppose that Our Lord in answer to their request, gave to the disciples this form, as a badge

of their belonging to Him, according to the custom of the Jewish Doctors, who always taught their disciples a peculiar form to add to their own, and further still as a kind of guide and pattern to them forever after.

Any amount of evidence might be brought forward to prove that the early Christians used the Lord's Prayer in their religious worship, and inasmuch as they did this, it is a proof that both Our Lord Himself and His Apostles made use of forms of prayer. St. Paul in another part of his Epistle to the Corinthians blames them, that when they came together, "every one had a psalm, had a doctrine." We cannot suppose however that the Apostle here intended them to understand by his words that he forbade the use of psalms in public worship, any more than he did the use of doctrines, but rather that he was displeased at them for not having the psalm altogether, *i. e.* for not joining in it: that so the whole congregation might attend one and the same part of divine worship at the same time. From whence it is reasonable to conclude, that the use of psalms was customary, and that the Apostle approved of it, only ordering them to join in the use of them, which we may suppose they did for the future, since we find by the Apostles second Epistle to them, that they reformed their abuses.

St. Peter tells us, that we ought to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asked us a reason of the hope that is in us with meekness and fear. And it is both right and proper that we should know ourselves and be able to shew to others how godly and truly Scriptural the service of our Church is, how exactly it is formed after the will of God, and so follows out the pattern which has been given us. How further-

more it is such as Our Lord Himself and His Apostles have sanctioned. A service which while it ensures decency and order, is calculated to raise our hearts to God, and by its beauty and solemnity is capable of inspiring in our hearts feelings suitable to religious worship.



PLAIN SERMONS ON THE LITURGY.

1 Cor., xiv. c., 40th v.—“Let all things be done decently and in order.”

IT was, my brethren, clearly and sufficiently proved by the Holy Scriptures, that Our Blessed Lord and His Apostles were in the constant habit of worshipping God, by and through the use of forms of prayer; and this fact was brought forward as the great argument in support of our own form of worship, which in this way comes to us under the sanction of Divine authority. It was further shewn that Our Lord had given His disciples, in answer to their request,—“Lord teach us to pray,”—the Lord’s Prayer, as a form of prayer, and as a model ever after by which to form all other prayers; and furthermore, that the apostles of Our Lord were in the daily habit of conducting public worship by the use of forms of prayer. That this was the manner in which the Apostles and the early Christians conducted the public worship of God, and the services of religion is a fact so well known to every one at all familiar with the history of the early Church, that it would be out of place to dwell at length upon it. And I shall now only refer to one passage of Scripture itself, which prove to us, that they were in the habit of joining in set forms of prayer, besides the Lord’s Prayer and the Psalms. In the Acts

of the Apostles we are told that Peter and John, after they had been threatened, and commanded not to preach the Gospel, went to their own company, and reported all that the Chief Priests and Elders had said unto them ; and when they heard that, they lifted up their voice with one accord, and said, " Lord thou art God, which hast made Heaven, and Earth, and the sea, and all that therein is." In this place we are told that " the whole company lift up their voice with one accord, and said—(i. e., they joined all together with audible voices in using these words") which they could not possibly have done, unless the prayer they asked was a pre-composed set form. For, whatever may be said in favor of joining mentally with a prayer ~~con-~~^{scribed} extempore : no one will contend that it is possible for a considerable congregation to join vocally or aloud, as the Apostles and their company are here said to have done, in a prayer so conceived. It is not simply said that the whole company lifted up their voice, but that they lifted up their voice with one accord, or all together ; so that from the very construction of the sentence, it is undeniably plain, that the persons here said to be present, uttered their prayer all together, and spake all at the same time ; and consequently, that the prayer must be a precomposed set form.

The very names which have come down to us from the first ages of Christianity and which were applied to the prayers in ordinary use, prove also that they worshipped God by the use of a set form, they are called, as we now speak of our Liturgy, " Common Prayer," constituted prayers, " solemn prayers." What, however, puts the matter beyond all question, is that there are now extant Liturgies which are ascribed to

St. Peter, St. Mark, and St. James, and which without any doubt are of very great antiquity. While we have, therefore, the clearest possible proof not only that the first Christians worshipped God by the use of a Liturgy, or by set forms of prayer; and furthermore, that Our Lord and His apostles, as members of the Jewish Church, were in the constant habit of attending the public services of religion which were conducted after the same manner, thus sanctioning their use. It will not be improper to point out some of the reasons why this manner of worshipping Almighty God is calculated above all other ways to honor him, Whom we worship, and to conduce most to the increase of devotion and piety amongst worshippers, The wise King of Israel gives us this advice, "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the House of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil; Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter anything before God: for God is in Heaven, and thou upon Earth; therefore let thy words be few." And when we consider who and what we are, the vast and immeasurable distance between God and ourselves, His Holiness and our sinfulness, the thoughts which would naturally fill the mind of the sinner would certainly be thoughts of our fear. We would feel this, if our eyes were open, and we should be led to exclaim with Jacob, "How dreadful is this place, this is none other than the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven." And to a mind thus impressed and bowed down, so to speak, with reverence, we should probably feel that in the presence of Almighty God, we could do little more than contemplate His surpassing holiness, and bow

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in silence before our Creator. Such, certainly, are the feelings with which we sinners should enter the special presence of Almighty God. And all our worship should partake of them.

And it is one of the very many and very great advantages which belong to the use of forms of prayer, that they insure to us reverence in our public worship. And our form of prayer does this, for it saves us from all undue excitement, all extravagance of expression, all false doctrine, and on the other hand we have devout expressions and humble petitions such as ought to come from the devout and humble worshipper. Extemporement prayers on the other hand possess none of these very great advantages,—they may be this or that or anything, whatever the maker pleases. He may have peculiar views of his own, possibly not warranted by the word of God, they may degenerate into occasions for the display of little more than fanatical enthusiasm, or as we know they did, in the case of the Puritans in England, into occasions for stirring up religious strife and bitterness, and for invective against all who were not as fanatical as themselves. To such ends our forms of prayer cannot be made to minister, they are free from such, and this is one of their great advantages. Another very great and striking advantage attending the use of forms of prayer is this, that inasmuch as they give us an opportunity to reflect upon the reverence due to Almighty God in our approach to Him, and are framed with care and thoughtfulness, so they ensure a more becoming and suitable manner of worship both in expression and in the substance of the petitions themselves, than could be attained in any other way ; and our own Liturgy is a striking illustration of this fact. Not only are our

prayers very beautiful, but furthermore, the order and arrangement are becoming and proper, and even here teach us a valuable lesson.— When the sinner comes to worship his creator, and approaches God, if he be a truly sincere and humble worshipper, he will feel how unworthy he is to enter the presence of God. And taking this to be the manner in which Christians come for public worship, our service very properly opens with passages of Holy Scripture in which we are invited to approach Almighty God, and in which He holds out the promise of pardon and forgiveness to all who repent and who forsake their sins ; and to this end we have at once a humble confession of sin, with a prayer for pardon through our Saviour Jesus Christ, immediately after which follows most suitably the Absolution, in which the priest is directed to declare the fact that Almighty God pardons the sins of all those who are really and truly sorry for them, and who thus come to Him desiring His forgiveness, when we have thus made our peace with God, and received his forgiveness, we then may properly go in to praise God and to read His Word, we may then join in the pleasures of religious worship, which we could not do while we had a sense of sin within us, which would destroy our comfort, and our peace of mind. Another advantage attending set forms of prayer, and by no means one of the least, is this, that the worship of Almighty God is not confined to the Minister alone, but that it can be joined in by the whole congregation, and instead of hearing another pray we may pray ourselves. * “ There are two things necessary to the obtaining an answer to our prayers : first that we sincerely desire good things at the hand

*Bloomfield.

of God, and secondly, it is required also, that we trust and depend upon God for his granting of them, according to the promises which he has made unto us through Jesus Christ. And undoubtedly one reason why men pray so often to no purpose is, because they do not take this course : but when they have done their prayers they forget all about their petitions, and concern themselves no more about them, than if they had never prayed at all. But how can we expect that God should answer our prayers, if we neither believe in Him nor trust in Him ? For certainly trusting in God, as it is one of the highest acts of religion that we can perform, so it is that which gives life and efficiency to our prayers, without which we have no ground at all to expect they should be answered. If then we hear another person utter a prayer, which he never made use of before, or which we never heard before and may never hear again ; how is it possible for us to remember what was prayed for, and thus to expect it at the hands of God, or to depend upon God to answer us.

But this is not so, when we make use of forms of prayer, for by using them, we can recollect at all times what we hear prayed for, we can ask the same thing again and again : we can consider distinctly what we have asked, and so set our faith and our confidence in Him, for the granting of every petition which we ask, according to the promise which to this end God has made to us. To pray thus with the understanding, to pray ourselves, not simply to hear another pray, to pray in forms truly Scriptural, beautifully simple, so simple and so plain, that the child, and the untaught can comprehend, this is the privilege of those who use our Church Liturgy, and with all that our prayers are plain

and simple, yet do they contain every petition which a Christian requires to ask of God, everything needful for himself, for others, and for the whole Church of God. The only request which needs to be added is, says an excellent writer upon this subject, **"That God would vouchsafe to continue the Liturgy itself in use, honor and veneration, in this Church forever."* While then we admire our Common Prayers, let us learn to use them. One great excellence is this, that they are for all alike for minister and the congregation together, you do not come to hear prayers, you come to pray, you come with your own heart and mouth to praise, to pray to, and to worship God ; and to this end the response and the parts of the service which are to be said by the congregation should be audibly joined in. The service otherwise is deprived of much of its beauty, and you defraud yourselves of the great privilege of joining in the worship of your Maker. But when on the other hand it is heartily joined in, with devotion and with sincerity, it is an approach to that worship which we trust we shall take part in, around the Throne of God, which is compared by St. John unto the voice of many waters.

*South.

THE SECOND DELIVERY OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

"And it came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of His disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples,"—*Luke, xi. 1.*

It will doubtless, my brethren, be remembered that our blessed Saviour had upon another occasion given to the multitudes the form of prayer, known as the Lord's prayer: for by turning to the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, we shall find that when our Lord delivered His Sermon upon the Mount, He instructed his hearers as to how they were to pray, and he then directed them to make use of this form.

And this delivery of the Lord's prayer we must not confound with its second delivery, which, as St. Luke tells us, was made at the request of a certain one of our Lord's disciples, because there is a very striking difference between the first and the second delivery of this prayer, and consequently we are able to gather much insight into the meaning and intention of of this difference, and so to draw from it a lesson to ourselves.

When our blessed Lord first delivered the Lord's prayer, it was in the course of His instruction to the multitude which surrounded Him. "And seeing the multitudes," St. Matthew says, "Christ went up into a mountain," and it was at this time, when our Lord delivered the prayer

which is called by his name, that he added to it the doxology, *i. e.* the words with which we are accustomed to conclude the prayer, viz: "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen." Now it will be observed that in the second delivery of this same prayer in the account which St. Luke gives to us, the concluding words, "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen," are omitted, and the prayer ends simply with the last petition, without even the word Amen. And this, my brethren, is a very important omission, and it was manifestly thus omitted for a particular reason, which a little consideration will tend to show was intended as a direct answer to the request of the disciple who said, "Lord, teach us to pray." The first delivery of this prayer, was, as we have seen by a reference to St. Matthew's Gospel, when our Saviour was surrounded by the multitude. Then it was that our Lord added the doxology, or the ascription which we make use of.

*A comparison between the Gospel and Law, will lead us to see, that the one was but the shadow of the other, and it is, therefore, not strange if we should further find something of the same similarity in the religious services which our Lord and his apostles have left us. In the solemn services of the temple, upon which our Saviour and his apostles were constant attendants, it was the custom, that when the priests had concluded a prayer, the people should make this response: "Blessed be the name of his kingdom forever and ever." The public prayer, *i. e.* the temple service or worship ended with a doxology very similar to the one with which the Lord's prayer ends. But this doxology, let it be remembered,

*Lightfoot.

was never made use of out of the temple, *i. e.* in the house at the times of private worship.

Now when it is borne in mind that our blessed Lord upon two separate and distinct occasions delivered the prayer which is called by His name, that upon the first occasion He was surrounded by great multitudes which had gathered to hear him, and that at this time He gave to them the Lord's prayer with the doxology added to it, and bade them thus to say, are we not clearly warranted in saying, since such was the usual manner of public worship, a thing which was well understood by the disciples and the multitude, are we not to conclude that our Lord designed to shew that the prayer which had now been given, was intended to be used at the public worship of the almighty God. Nor can we in anywise doubt that the disciples of our Lord well understood this, and a further consideration of the request which the disciple at this time made of Christ and the circumstances attending it, will make us to understand that what the disciples now wanted was a form of prayer for private devotion, inasmuch as they had at a former time been taught how they were to pray in the public worship of the congregation. St. Luke tells us that at this time our Lord was engaged in private prayer, "It came to pass, that, as He was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." And this fact as here related to us by the Evangelist, throws great light upon the request which the disciple, probably on the part of his fellow disciples, made of our blessed Lord. Our Saviour as was His habit, had retired for private prayer, and for communion with God the Father, for we must bear in mind that while Christ was God,

He was man also, and as such, He required the same grace and divine assistance as ourselves. It was, therefore, our Lord's custom to pass a great portion of the time which His duties left at His disposal, in retirement and in prayer. We read that rising a great while before day He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. At another time, Christ says to the disciples, "Come ye yourselves into a desert place and rest awhile." And St. Luke says, "And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." While St. Matthew in his Gospel says, "And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, He was there alone."

Such we see was the custom of our Saviour, to retire oftentimes for private prayer and for secret devotion. It was immediately after our Lord had been thus engaged, after He had ceased praying, that one of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray." When therefore it is borne in mind that Christ had upon a former occasion given to the disciples the Lord's prayer ending with the ascription or doxology as a form to be made use of in public worship, we can very well believe that what the disciples now wanted was a form of prayer to be used in private, and in their homes. And when we further remember that Christ had Himself just been engaged in private devotion, this idea is still further strengthened. But when we find that our Lord, when thus asked by the disciple for a form, gave in answer to the request the Lord's prayer without the doxology and without the Amen, which were only used upon the occasion of public worship, having upon a former occasion

given this form with these additions, are we not fully warranted in saying, that Christ in the plainest possible manner has given to us this prayer not only for our public worship, but furthermore for our private devotions as well. But, while we must feel that our Saviour has thus, not alone sanctioned the use of that prayer which bears His name, in public and in our private devotions, but in thus giving it to us upon two separate occasions, that His words have the force and significance of a command; there is yet something in the manner of the giving of this prayer, and in the circumstances attending it, which must to every Christian, to every one who really loves his Lord, be even yet more binding, if that were possible, than the command itself could be. It was, St. Luke tells us, "as our Lord Himself was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said unto Him, Lord, teach us to pray." We cannot doubt that this time was selected by the disciples as a suitable one to ask Christ to teach them how to pray, for He had Himself just now been in prayer and in mysterious intercourse with the Father, in fellowship with the world unseen. And it may be, that like as the face of Moses shone with a heavenly and a dazzling radiance when he came down from the mount, where God had talked with him, so very likely there may have been after such seasons of retirement and of prayer, something about our Lord, which more than upon other occasions, made His disciples to feel that a surpassing holiness possessed and filled Him. And it was upon this occasion that the disciples sought instruction in prayer, Christ had Himself been just now engaged in this duty, now, above all other times, it was most suitable to say to Him, "Lord,

teach us to pray." And it was in answer to this request, made, let it be remembered, when Christ had Himself just ceased to pray, that our Lord gave to the disciples the form of prayer which bears His name. There can, therefore, be no greater, no higher argument for the use of the Lord's prayer in our public services and in our private devotions, than that which is here afforded us, "When ye pray, say Our Father." And without doubt we here have all that a Christian needs to ask, for time and for eternity. If we weigh thoughtfully the words which Christ has given us, we must surely feel that such a form must be divine, for no human lips could have uttered it, no human genius have originated it. And I think, my brethern, that we ought to feel mistrustful of ourselves, if ever we find that the Lord's prayer is not sufficient for us, and if our wants exceed what is here asked for. Not that we are to make use of no other prayer, for we ought to look upon this one, not only as given for frequent use, but also as a pattern by which to frame and fashion all other prayers. Not but that at times we may feel as if we must dwell on some one particular want, some pressing need more than on others. But that in the main we should feel that here we can find a suitable utterance for all our wants, a becoming expression for all our needs, at the mercy seat of God. And if we had but a moment to spend in prayer, what so suitable as this one, which contains all our wants and expresses all our desires, which has come to us direct from Christ Himself, and was given to us when He Himself had just ceased to pray. And if we find that we cannot make this sufficient, if we find that through it we cannot give utterance to our wishes and our wants, we may then safely conclude that

those wishes and those wants require to be checked rather than granted, if we cannot do so in that form which Christ Himself has given us, and which He has Himself assured us comprehends all that we need to ask for. And when we picture to ourselves our Lord Himself engaged in prayer to God the Father, and remember that He was in all things like unto us, sin only excepted, that at such a time even when He had ceased praying, He could in answer to the request, "Lord, teach us to pray," bid us say Our Father, then we must feel that no prayer can take the place of this prayer, and that no prayer can wing its way so speedily to the mercy seat, or find such acceptance there, as that which our Redeemer gave, when one of His disciples said unto Him, "Lord, teach us to pray."